

The Conservation Land

The terrain that comprises the Old Rifle Range Conservation Land, too hilly and swampy for farming, had a distant past as a rifle range. The main trail tracks along the side of a wooded ridge, passing the remains of four target berms that were built here a century ago. The wetland section on the opposite side of the range is known as Ministerial Swamp. This mixed landscape together with the crumbling concrete berms and rusting steel target frames evokes images of Concord Volunteer Militia and WWI soldiers sharpening their marksmanship skills here in preparation for war.

Location and Access

Access with parking for six vehicles is located on Old Marlborough Road in West Concord diagonally across from Williams Road where a large sign and information kiosk identify the start of the main trail. There are other access points off Old Mill Road and Ministerial Drive, but these do not offer parking.

Dog Owners: Keep dogs under your control at all times and away from private yards and buildings. It is the duty of each person who owns, possesses, or controls a dog to remove and dispose of any waste left by his or her dog.



Wooded Ridgeline Main Trail



Town of Concord

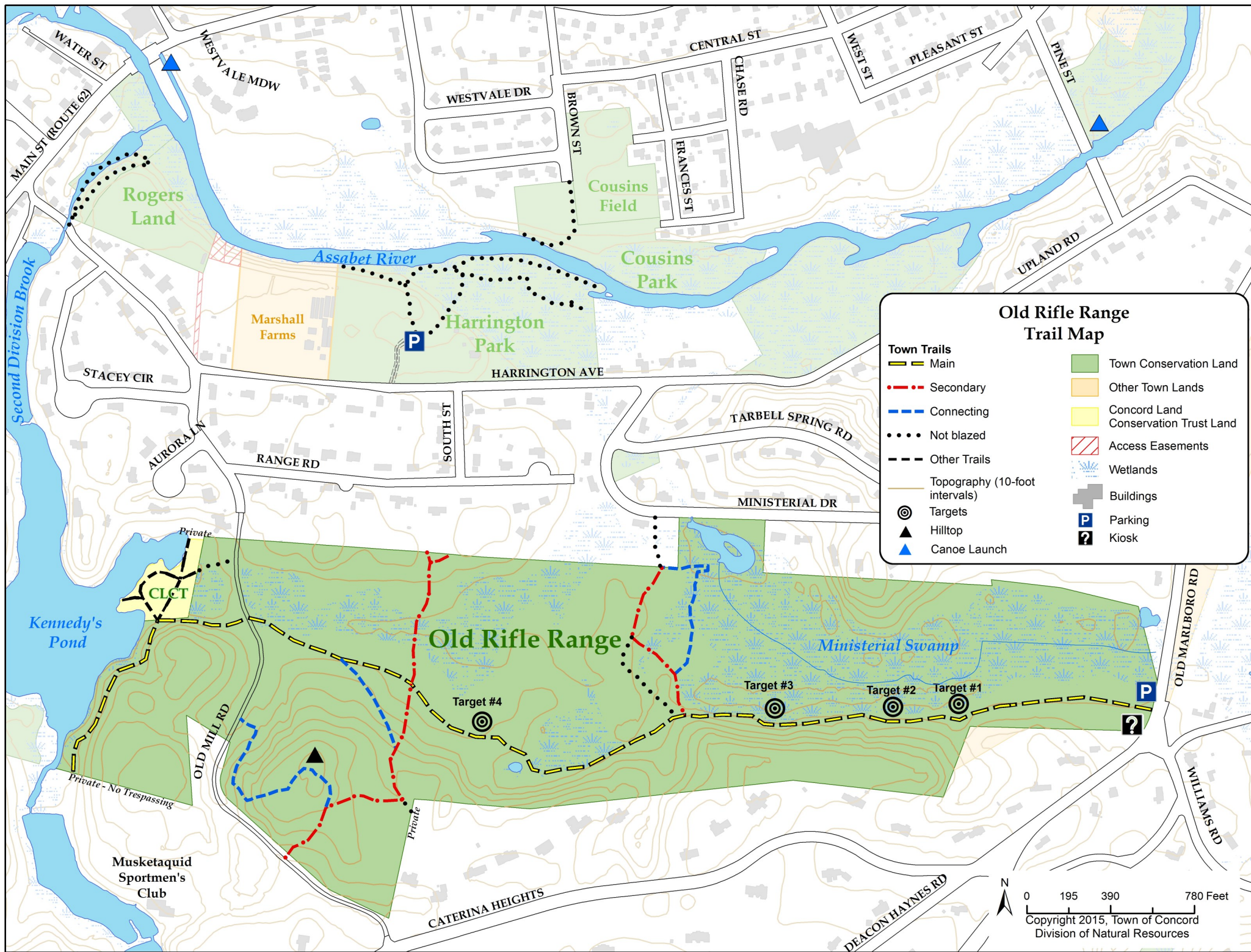
Old Rifle Range Trail Guide



Target # 2



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Old Rifle Range

Rifle Range History

In 1908, the Massachusetts General Court authorized cities and towns having volunteer Militia to establish rifle ranges. In that same year, the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia consisted of two brigades, with Concord in the First Brigade, 6th Infantry Regiment, Company I. (The Massachusetts Militia became the Massachusetts State Guard in 1917, the Massachusetts Military Reserve in 1994, and now the Massachusetts State Defense Force.) The rifle range was established for training Concord Company I with headquarters at the original armory built in 1887 at 51 Walden Street, (a performing arts center since 1919). “The Enterprise”, the local newspaper at that time, reported that Company I would hold its first shoot on the new rifle range, “a very complete range of the most modern construction”, on Saturday, October 29, 1910.

While the facility was completed for Concord Company I, it soon got extensive use for training U. S. Army soldiers prior to their deployment in 1917 for World War I. Significant usage of the Concord Rifle Range after that time is unlikely because in 1926 weapons training for the Massachusetts

State Guard consolidated at Camp Curtiss Guild in Reading, Mass.

Conservation Land Development

The original 111.6 acre tract was the site of a rifle range from its opening in 1910 until 1951 when it was deemed unsuitable for use with modern weapons. A long range plan for control of the rifle range was created in 1958, placing it under the care of The Town Forest Committee and The Recreation Commission. The Recreation Commission declined a 1958 request to turn the site into a refuse disposal area, citing its need for passive recreation and a buffer between potential developments. A subsequent evaluation by the Massachusetts Forest Service supported this decision. In 1964 a 7.5-acre parcel purchased from the Musketaquid Sportsman’s Club was added between Old Mill Road and the southwest corner of the conservation land.

As you walk the Old Rifle Range, please be respectful of our neighbors by not trespassing onto private land. The trails on the adjacent Concord Land Conservation Trust Land are open to the public.

Points of Interest

Target Berms

The range included targets mounted behind four abutments at intervals of 200, 300, 600, and 1,000 yards.



Target #3: 600 Yard

A primary firing point plus two alternates provided for simultaneous shooting at each abutment distance plus 500 and 800 yards. Each berm consisted of a concrete wall front-filled with stone and earth to protect the men who raised and lowered targets behind them. The berms and rusted remnants of the target raising equipment are all that remain today. No trace remains of a range house that provided shelter.

To view this conservation land as a rifle range requires imagining it without the dense forest cover that blocks visibility from its firing positions at

Old Marlborough Road all the way down range to the farthest target at 1,000 yards distance.



View of Kennedy's Pond from Old Rifle Range

Kennedy's Pond

This peaceful 15-acre pond serves as the far west boundary of the Old Rifle Range. The pond was originally named Hayward's Pond for the family that built it by damming the Second Division Brook about 1850. Thoreau's journals refer to it as a mill pond, but it is known to have been used by the Concord Ice Company and a Mr. Forbes for harvesting ice. John and Elsie Kennedy, who operated the South Bridge Boat House in the 1950s, purchased it from Mr. Forbes for use in demonstrating boats. In 1975, the U. S. Geological Survey changed the name to Kennedy's Pond, recognizing the family's use of the pond and surrounding land as a community summer camp in the 1950s.

The Climbing Fern of Ministerial Swamp

Ministerial Swamp gets its name from the tract it is part of, a wood lot originally set aside in the 1600s for the ministers of First Parish Church. The canopy of mixed birch, aspen, pine, and oak at the Old Marlborough Road entrance is bordered on the north by this swampy land. While similar to other acid bogs in the area, Ministerial Swamp is unique for its association with a rare climbing fern (*Lygodium palmatum*) first discovered here in 1851 by Henry David Thoreau who surveyed the area. He described it as an unusual fern that is an evergreen, ivy-like plant that grows along the ground in woods within the swamp and climbs 3 to 5 feet up other plants. It is the only fern in New England that twines like a vine and is very rare. The New England Wildflower Society included the Ministerial Swamp fern in its 2009 field study of rare plants, citing its importance in an environment of rapid habitat degradation from development and invasive species, though it has not been observed at the Old Rifle Range in recent years.



The Climbing Fern (*Lygodium palmatum*)

Suggested Walks

Target Trail - The Main trail from Old Marlborough Road straight through to Kennedy's Pond offers the full experience of the Rifle Range Conservation Land, passing the four old rifle range target berms before reaching the peaceful pond waterscape. Reverse direction back to the parking area. Walking time 30 minutes each way.



Target Raising Apparatus

Hilltop Loop – Beginning at the junction of the main yellow blazed trail with the red blazed trail west of the fourth target berm, turn south (left) on the red trail. After passing a blue blazed trail to the right, turn right onto a second blue blazed trail that leads to the high point of the Old Rifle Range. Continuing on the blue blazed trail descends to Old Mill Road, where a right turn leads to the crossing of the main yellow blazed trail. A right turn on the main trail leads back to the starting point at the red blazed trail junction. Walking time 20 minutes.